

Edith Cowan University
Research Online

Theses : Honours

Theses

1992

Tied to tradition: The silenced rage of the African woman in selected novels of Buchi Emechata

Marie Giselle Martine Raphael
Edith Cowan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons



Part of the [Literature in English, Anglophone outside British Isles and North America Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Raphael, M. G. (1992). *Tied to tradition: The silenced rage of the African woman in selected novels of Buchi Emechata*. https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/418

This Thesis is posted at Research Online.
https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/418

Edith Cowan University

Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.
- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. Where the reproduction of such material is done without attribution of authorship, with false attribution of authorship or the authorship is treated in a derogatory manner, this may be a breach of the author's moral rights contained in Part IX of the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth).
- Courts have the power to impose a wide range of civil and criminal sanctions for infringement of copyright, infringement of moral rights and other offences under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

TIED TO TRADITION: THE
SILENCED RAGE OF THE
AFRICAN WOMAN IN SELECTED
NOVELS OF BUCHI EMECHETA.

BY

MARIE GISELE MARTINE
RAPHAEL

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Award of B.A. HONS. (ENGLISH)

SCHOOL OF COMMUNITY AND LANGUAGE STUDIES

EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY

DATE OF SUBMISSION: NOVEMBER 2, 1992

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DECLARATION.....	iv
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. SLAVERY VERSUS REVOLT IN <i>THE SLAVE GIRL</i>	9
III. MOTHERHOOD AS INSTITUTION IN <i>THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD</i>	29
IV. THRUST TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE IN <i>SECOND-CLASS CITIZEN</i>	47
V. CONCLUSION.....	68
ENDNOTES.....	77
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	83

ABSTRACT

In addressing the myths of past and present social and familial structures and hierarchies, Post-Colonial Literatures are forced to confront complex assertions of identity, evolved through an inheritance shaped by both traditional and foreign influence. In a study of Buchi Emecheta's novels, *The Slave Girl*, *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Second-Class Citizen*, a tension is thus seen to emerge within the African heroine, between "her communally-bred sense of herself as an African, and her feminist aspirations for autonomy and self-realization as a woman" (Frank, 1987, 45).

Though the female protagonists of these narratives are placed within different historical moments of the colonial and post-colonial experience, they are nonetheless linked by a common reality - all curiously participate in their own debilitating oppression. Whilst this implies an inherent form of African female passivity, all aspirations towards self-determination are not automatically repressed.

This thesis thus explores certain social, cultural and ideological aspects of the Ibo society portrayed in Emecheta's works. It goes on to look at how these factors simultaneously contribute to and

prevent the sustained manifestation of rage against tradition in *The Slave Girl* and *The Joys of Motherhood*. In *Second-Class Citizen*, where the protagonist achieves a degree of self-realization, the thesis examines the factors which appear to have assisted in this progress.

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature

Date.....2/11/92.....

I. INTRODUCTION

TO ME...THE FEMALE SEX IS NOT THE WEAKER
SEX; IT IS THE NOBLER OF THE TWO: FOR IT
IS EVEN TODAY THE EMBODIMENT OF SACRIFICE,
SILENT SUFFERING, HUMILITY, FAITH AND
KNOWLEDGE.¹

In any pronouncement in which a differentiation of the sexes presupposes certain characterological implications as in the above epigraph, one is immediately alerted to the interconnectedness of language, ideology and the making of myths. As Stephen Slemon states:

Since language mediates the way in which we see the past and the traditions that inform the present, we have to pay attention not only to historical content but also to the 'lenses of language' that bring it into focus.²

Mohandas Gandhi's valorization of the female sex may thus draw from the bonds of tradition that link the perceptions of one Indian generation to the next, but note how its nationalistic intention met with little resistance - women, encouraged to participate in the "peaceful" struggle against the British, themselves believed that "satyagraha, 'this new form of warfare,' was particularly suited to them because it emphasized qualities that were 'feminine rather

than masculine'".³ This conspicuous female internalization of a gender-based ideology may not be a "Third-world phenomenon", but has become, by virtue of the link between women, nationalism and tradition, directly exacerbated through "Third-world experience".

India, like Africa, is a post-colonial society, forced to mediate its cultural integrity between its own traditional inheritance and the debilitating, external impact of colonialism. Gandhi, in fact, hailed Indian women as "*the guardians of tradition*".⁴ This title denied them the right to challenge the past, the source of India's sense of national identity, that now had to withstand the assault of British imperialism. Ernest Renan believes that:

The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are.⁵

In the face of this tension between past, present and future, it is the concept of "nation", of a pristine pre-colonial heritage, that forces the woman of the Third World, irrespective of race, to collude with traditions which only serve to "keep her firmly in her place".

Whilst an important link between the Indian and the African woman is implied in this instance through a colonizer/colonized equation, it does not automatically subsume the cultural disparities between the two. A recognition of the heterogeneous nature of post-colonial societies is in fact essential to a rejection of ultimately unsatisfactory Western binary models, which fail to acknowledge that "post-colonial societies also have their own internal centres and peripheries, their own dominants and marginals".⁶

Within the realm of African literature, this conflict between the "dominant", which boasts an impressive male-defined literary canon and the "marginal", its burgeoning female equivalent, resides within the literary representation of women. Many male African writers tend to subscribe to a certain fetishization of the female "object", as exemplified in the work of Léopold Senghor, a prominent Négritude poet. Women, portrayed as benign, maternal, iconic figures also have their place in the works of Achebe, p'Bitek and Ngugi.⁷ Through their valorization of the dyadic relationship between mother and child, however, women are indirectly assigned a subordinated rather than a key role within the African experience: "male writers present womanhood and motherhood but within

the context of the larger societal problems".⁸

In the work of Buchi Emecheta, the authority of male-defined female experience is not only questioned, but subverted. She is in fact one of the first Nigerian female writers to explore the institution of womanhood and motherhood, as it applies to an Ibo African context.⁹ Now, it is the woman herself who speaks, scrutinizing, questioning and judging the validity of traditions and social practices that have presumably ultimate sway over her consciousness. Even though Emmanuel Obiechina discusses this issue strictly in terms of men and male concerns, his insights have implications for an understanding of the African woman's position:

The individual has a real existence only in terms of the general, social framework of the community...In his social capacity his individuality is largely predetermined by social institutions, his social status and his specific position within the social hierarchy as defined by the society. He is born into a clan already bearing an ancestral stamp, for he is supposed to be under the tutelary influence of one of his ancestors whose name he bears. He will, if he lives long enough, beget children who will continue the life of the clan. He is therefore not solely an autonomous individual but has mystic bonds with the dead and the living of the clan.¹⁰

No subtlety of rhetoric can actually mask what this link between the individual, society and tradition means in terms of the African woman -

social and sexual oppression. Is this, however, a truly objective perspective, or one, which even a hybrid consciousness like my own, cannot divorce from a Western mentality? According to Spivak, "we grieve for our Third-World sisters; we grieve and rejoice that they must lose themselves and become as much like us as possible in order to be 'free'".¹¹ The tacit assumption here is that the African female needs to be liberated from a fundamentally oppressive cultural heritage, irrespective of whether she actually sees herself as oppressed. Spivak's concern highlights the problematic nature of the unqualified application of Western feminist theories to the female-authored African text. In this respect, she echoes Said's insistence upon the need for critical self-awareness in any literary approach to the Orient. He, quoting Antonio Gramsci, believes that:

The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory [making it]...imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory.¹²

This sentiment engenders, at the very least, a need for a degree of sensitivity in probing the varied cultural influences which form the matrix of any African female writer.

Even in the "mildest" theoretical postulations of Western feminism, there is a conspicuous leaning towards a form of female separatism, which is incongruous with the cultural specifics of an African social context:

'In traditional African societies, the role of each citizen is to perpetuate the status quo, to assure continuity of the clan, to work within tradition.' The 'new woman', or feminist...rebels against such traditionalism because she evinces 'a theory of personhood where the individual exists as an independent entity rather than a group member, where she is defined by her experiences rather than her kinship relations, where she has responsibility to realize her potential for happiness rather than to accept her role, where she has indefinable value rather than quantitative financial worth, and where she must reason about her own values rather than fit into stereotyped tradition'.¹³

This conflict between the traditional and the "new woman" figures emerges in the three novels to be examined in this paper, *The Slave Girl*, *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Second-Class Citizen*. Whilst Emecheta's work is clearly feministic in purpose, it should be noted that she herself refuses this title, aligning her vision instead with what she terms "womanism...the African kind of feminism".¹⁴ This, according to Carole Boyce Davies, "respects African woman's status as mother but questions obligatory motherhood and the traditional favoring of sons".¹⁵

In Emecheta's work, the mother/child bond is not

denigrated, despite the portrayal of the grim "realities" of womanhood and motherhood within Ibo society. Emecheta even employs a powerful image of slavery to convey "her central vision of female bondage, her underlying metaphor of African womanhood as a condition of victimization and servitude".³⁶ Whilst each of her three novels consequently focus on particular aspects and implications of this slavery motif - outward enforcement of slavery, inner acceptance of self-enslavement and the deterrents against female defiance of a slave status - the tension between subjugation and revolt is not strictly confined to the individual versus tradition opposition.

In fact, the social context portrayed within Emecheta's novels has been robbed of its pristine tribal identity by the impact of external, colonial forces. On a dramatic level, one could even claim that the progressive time frames and settings of the three texts to be examined actually symbolize a disintegration of native consciousness. In *The Slave Girl*, action is centred within the village sphere, during the First World War, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, the social context is removed to the urban environment of Lagos just prior to the Second World War and in *Second-Class Citizen*, it is the 1960's: Nigeria has gained Independence, but the

margin/centre phenomenon is still relatively intact
in that London remains the native's ultimate goal.

The interference of male-centred colonial ideologies within tribal life is, therefore, integral to any discussion of Emecheta's heroines, who though strong, purposeful and assertive, are perpetually caught in a three-fold conflict between self-determination, a traditionally inscribed female identity and an externally exacerbated female status.

II. SLAVERY VERSUS REVOLT IN *THE SLAVE GIRL*.

EVERY GESTURE, EVERY WORD INVOLVES OUR
PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE.¹

To be tied to tradition is to be locked into a Janus-faced posture, condemned to falter between two worlds, in which any fleeting vision of the future is persistently challenged by dogma from the past. Though this concept of enslavement is foregrounded in *The Slave Girl* through the slavery motif already mentioned, it is defined against an important backdrop of female revolt. This textual conflict must be examined, since it is directly relevant to the predicament of Ogbanje Ojebeta, the heroine of the novel.

The prologue to this text is, in this instance, of special significance, in that here the origins of Ojebeta's community are traced, thereby situating the present society's sexual and social temperament in relation to a temporal continuum of sanctified African belief and practice:

the people referred to Ibuza as the town of nine slices...One of the slices of this town was the village of Umuisagba...just as the segments of an orange are encased within a firm peel, the segments of Ibuza were held together by their relationship

to their forebear, Umejei.²

Immediately noticeable is the fragility of the individual's social status in the face of a fundamental social decree: "all souls are equal, none is greater than the other" (9). Even a prince, like Umejei, is therefore accountable for murder, accidental or otherwise, though rank precludes the enforcement of a death penalty. This spirit of social homogeneity is, however, a gender-based phenomenon, since even though women may be the bearers of sons, it is their male offspring who remain forever the central concern. Thus, when the prince is subsequently banished, he is voluntarily accompanied by his mother and sisters, who relinquish community for the sake of a male kinship tie. All souls may be equal within this community, but in life, even the African woman knows that she is assigned a relational, not autonomous value, a sentiment that persists within the context of the novel's present.

Encapsulated within this prologue is also a forthright subversion of tradition, as glimpsed through the description of the Umuisagba women, Ojebeta's direct forebears:

If a good wife was in trouble of any kind, instead of calling on God to help her she could call out either the name of her husband or of the god of her husband's people; certainly not the gods in the huts

of her own father, for they should cease to exist for her, the day her bride price is paid. From that day she should be loyal to her husband, his gods and his people, in body and in spirit. The daughters of Umuisagba, however, would never deign to comply with this tradition. (11)

In acknowledging, from the outset, this powerful digression from traditional norm, Emecheta signals the conflict that will emerge in the novel between society's absolute authority over the individual and Ojebeta's own inherited capacity for revolt. Through a subsequent allusion to the slave girl story, this notion of female subjugation is directly linked to the African woman's supposed unquestioning respect for tradition.

Tribal ritual demands that the burial of a chief's wife must befit the social status she previously enjoyed. Her personal slave is thus sacrificed, so that her mistress, equipped with cooking utensils and domestic help, will be adequately served in her voyage beyond death. The textual implications of this slave girl episode are signalled through the tensions it refracts between tradition, defiance and female subordination:

The chief wife of the master of the house had died, and it was necessary for her husband to send her to the land of the dead accompanied by a female slave. The one chosen was...said to be a princess captured in war from another Ibo village...On the eve of the burial she was brought and ordered to lie down in the shallow grave. As might be expected, she

resisted...She made appeals to the gods of her people to save her, she begged some of the mourners to spare her life...but to no avail. One of the sons of the dead woman lost his patience...took a club and struck the defenceless woman hard at the back of her shaved head...She did not drop down into the grave...Instead she turned to look at the chief, who was calling on his son to cease his brutality, and she said to him, 'For showing me this little mercy, chief, I shall come again, I shall come again....'

She was not allowed to finish her valedictory statement, for the stubborn young man, disregarding his father's appeal, gave the woman a final blow so that she fell by the side of the grave. But she was still struggling even when the body of her dead mistress was placed on her. She still fought and cried out, so alive. Soon her voice was completely silenced by the damp earth that was piled on both her and the dead woman...[Later] one of the chief's younger wives...had a baby daughter very like the slave princess who had been buried alive...this little girl was born with a lump on the back of her head, in the same place as where the slave princess had been struck. (61-62)

One may at first assume that this human sacrifice is initiated by virtue of class, since one cannot fail to differentiate between the "worth" of a chief's wife, as opposed to that of a slave. Within a traditional, hierarchized African society, however, female social status is derived primarily from male accomplishment. Hence, the spectacle that precedes the chief's wife's interment occurs only because of a status accorded to her through marriage. Consequently, what is highlighted through this outward display of female importance is in fact the subordinated position of women within the

traditional structure, since even beyond death, it is only the domestic role that is perpetuated, irrespective of status.

Male supremacy is also reinforced at the other end of the spectrum, since in the case of the victim, the title of slave is imposed, not inherent. Female status is, therefore, ultimately irrelevant within the African situation, displaced by the implications of gender which place women, whether princess or slave, forever under the threat of male ownership, "legitimate" or otherwise. Sacrifice by virtue of class is thus translated, in this instance, into sacrifice by virtue of being born a woman. It is, therefore, significant that even though the slave girl is slain in the name of another woman, it is men and male interests that have shaped every step of her destiny.

Male writers and critics of African literature have often presented the traditional world as "an ordered society with women playing a secondary but cheerfully accepted and important role".³ This facile generalization implies that the bond between women and passivity is not only traditionally "correct", but also encouraged by the African woman herself. Strangely, no note of collusion with oppression emerges throughout the burial episode. In fact, what stands out is the vitality of the slave

girl's protest against her fate, which makes the silencing of her resistance seem even more emphatic. Allegiance to tradition is, therefore, not voluntary, but enforced, with the death through suffocation imagery evoking a powerful metaphor of African society's suppression of the female voice. Moreover, the reincarnation factor that dominates this narrative distinguishes at one level an *a priori* phenomenon - women remain oppressed from one generation to the next through the parent/child relationship. Hence, the crude lump which marks the subsequent reincarnated "slave figure" symbolically invokes a dual reality - a physical manifestation of continued male oppression and, figuratively speaking, the relentless eruption of female defiance.

In the light of Ojebeta's inherited streak of rebellion and this reincarnation slavery motif, an important dichotomy is invoked between inner defiance and outward constraint. In one respect, Ojebeta is allied to the slave girl, since she too is sacrificed by her patriarchal society through being wrenched from the security of her childhood environment and sold into slavery. Conversely, according to Renan's perspective of the past, her Umuisagba inheritance would seem to point to a certain potential for self-determination: "Of all

cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are".⁴

Through a symbolic childhood experience, however, one is alerted to her greater vulnerability to outward subjugation.

As a child, Ojebeta is favoured by a transient sense of social importance, since her survival, as only daughter, accords her an anomalous status within her familial environment. This is an uncommon practice in a society which privileges the birth of male rather than female issue: "Girl children were not normally particularly prized creatures, but Okwuekwu [the father] had lost so many that they now assumed a quality of preciousness" (19). Ironically, by virtue of this "preciousness", the slavery heritage of the African past is menacingly linked to her own female future. According to the *dibia*, the native doctor, her survival can only be ensured if she is adorned with special copper charms procured from Idu, a land which derives its importance from its previously lucrative alliance with European colonialists and slave traders:

If you want this casual visitor [Ogbanje Ojebeta] to stay and be a permanent member of your household, to be your daughter, you will see to it that your husband gets someone to go to Idu for him to get this copper metal which the Potokis give the king of Idu in exchange for the human slaves they buy. (18)

The copper metal, which is subsequently blessed and placed around Ojebeta's arms and legs, is in reality Spanish coin or "blood money". Immediately projected is thus a powerful image of woman, manacled from birth and faced with future subjugation at the hands of mutually oppressive systems, as symbolized through the "unholy" alliance between tribal and colonial forces.

It is at this point that one is forced to look closely at the circumstances surrounding Ojebeta's actual descent into slavery, which stems immediately from the selfish actions of the brother who sells her, but is also inextricably linked to the sinister impact of colonialism. The native village ambience of Ibuza may be far removed from the white man's world, but not even this tribal insularity can safeguard it from particularly aggressive aspects of white society. By virtue of their colonial ties, the innocent people of Ibuza are thus directly embroiled in the First World War and forced to suffer the fatal consequences of chemical warfare:

There was a kind of sudden death spreading in that area. (24)

This felenza was a new thing that the 'Potokis' had shot into the air, though everyone wondered why. (26)

The central tension in the novel is thus obliquely derived from white society's interference in native

life. Felenza kills Ojebeta's parents and causes her oldest brother, Owezim, to flee from the village:

When felenza was at its height her eldest brother decided to leave home in search of a European job; he would rather go and face whatever fate awaited him in an unknown place than stay in Ibuza waiting for felenza to come to him. (27)

Bereft of her traditional protectors, father and older brother, Ojebeta is left in the hands of her other brother Okolie. He is an atypical African figure who readily spurns the sacredness of the African family unit and traditionally imposed responsibilities:

Okolie was noisy, he was not very industrious, and he hated going to the farm. (13)

What...was there for a young bachelor like himself to do with a little sister of merely seven years of age? (36)

Eager to be well-presented for his coming-of-age dance, he thus decides to sell his young sister to Ma Palagada, a rich distant relative, in order to finance his material "needs". Though troubled by the outrageous nature of this act, he quietens his conscience with the view that "Ogbanje Ojebeta was now being offered a chance to make the best of her life" (38), though one is fully aware of her actual lack of control over this transaction. In fact, at every stage of her life thus far, her future, like

that of the slave figure, has been determined by the male forces around her, the *dibia*, her father and now her brother.

In *Prospero and Caliban*, O. Mannoni states that "Not all peoples can be colonized; only those who experience this need [for dependency]".⁵ Though this viewpoint would appear to reside within a post-colonial context, its inherent essentialism has been repeatedly used to sanction the domination of women by men, a process described by Kate Millett as, "a most ingenious form of 'interior colonization'".⁶ Since one cannot deny the distinct theoretical parallel between female and native subordination in this instance, a brief examination of Fanon's rebuttal of Mannoni's above proposition is necessary. He states that if a person:

lives in a society that makes his inferiority complex possible, in a society that derives its stability from the perpetuation of this complex...he will find himself thrust into a neurotic situation.⁷

Consequently, whether it be imperialistic or sexual colonization, the subordination of one individual by another on the basis of sex or colour derives its momentum from the dominant interests of the society in question. This being the case, one can only assume that the "slave girl syndrome" of African

women is no more a "natural" state than the supposed "dependency complex" of colonized peoples. It is, rather, an insidious form of psychological coercion, facilitated by complex cultural and sociological myths and structures.

Whilst a puerile, ingrained female reliance upon male protection and benevolence initially prompts Ojebeta to unwittingly follow her brother to the market where she will be sold, she does not passively submit to his sinister plans. In fact, the intensity of her revolt against the prospect of being forced into slavery is strikingly dramatized:

just like a hunter's arrow that had been quivering impatiently in its bow while the hunter covered his prey until the opportune moment to let fly, so did Ogbanje Ojebeta dash out of the Palagada cloth stall. She ran, almost flew like an arrow, her little legs like wings, her heart beating fast in fear and anticipation. (56-57)

The subsequent, albeit temporary, quietening of this rebellion is partly due to the impact of communal intimacy, which appears to be a primary motivating force behind female collusion with oppression. Obiechina defines why this notion of community is central to a traditional society:

The existence of a traditional culture depends on the existence of a community, that is, the kind of society in which there is intimate face-to-face relationship and co-operation among people

permanently resident in a single locality...[Consequently] the identification of the individual with the group of which he forms part, and with its social and cultural outlook, is the very essence of traditionalism".⁸

Through slavery, Ojebeta is forced into a state of anomie, since she is stripped of parentage, filial love and tribal security. Like the other girl slaves before her, she can now only seek solace through her fellow "inmates", a process that will eventually lead her to a peculiar sense of belonging, as evinced by another young slave:

'This is our house,' Amanna pointed out with pride and enthusiasm; so great was her adaptation and acceptance that she obviously really did look on it as her home. (88-9)

For a while, as Ma's son's prospective bride, she also acquires and comes to delight in a certain enhancement of status.

When Ma dies, however, her immediate reaction is that of revolt against the prospect of a new slave/master relationship with Ma's daughter, Victoria: "'I am not going to Bonny with you,' she shouted defiantly. 'I am going to my people. I'm going home!'" (144). This spirited rebellion stems, in fact, from Ojebeta's own realization of the brutal implications of slavery:

'Would you like to come with us?...My husband is a teacher so he will be able to

help you, and then, when you are ready,
you will marry over there, and have a
house and children of your own.'
*Yes, and be forever reminded that I am a
slave and have any child of mine called
one. (126)*

Her observation is profoundly ironic, however, in view of her exposure to Christian education, which has literally sealed her future voluntary cooperation with enslaving sexual ideals.

It is the turn of the 19th century and Western mission activity is at its peak. Initial native distrust of foreign religion exposes slaves, rather than legitimate daughters and sons to the white man's learning:

Mrs Simpson...wanted Ma Palagada to send some of her children [to]...Church Missionary Society school...However, whereas people then were still very reluctant to consign their actual children to these foreign places of learning, it was acceptable to send domestic slaves so long as their going did not tamper with their daily tasks. (102)

According to Sylvia Leith-Ross' study of the Igbo, "The people had no hunger for salvation but they were hungry for education which they saw would benefit them".⁹ In the case of the Palagada slaves, however, the blurring of these domains clearly invalidates any prospect of self-development. Since religious doctrine extols the virtues of obedience and patient suffering, it only serves to reinforce a slave-like mentality, thereby ensuring continued

oppression: "The Bishop took the gifts from them, blessed the labour of their hands, and told them to obey their masters and work diligently in all they were employed to do" (110).

Missionary education also entails exposure to Victorian codes of sexual morality - a tacit endorsement of the traditional African male/female hierarchical order. Consequently, though an ability to read and write the colonialist's tongue elevates the status of Ma's girls to that of "élite slaves" (105), they, as women, become even further enslaved to African gender definitions. Thus, when Ojebeta is told of Ma's son's intentions to marry her, she not only submits to the "necessary" acquisition of Western domestic skills, but also remains undaunted by the actual reality of this pseudo-privileged position, Clifford's "kitchen wife, at least, if not the elegant parlour one" (129).

Her demand for freedom at Ma's death may thus grant her release from physical slavery, but she is now psychologically unable to shake off the subordinating Christian ideals of womanhood. Instead, her return to her traditional village leaves her yearning for an educated, Christian husband, who will be able to both appreciate and benefit from her domestic and Christian training. Ironically, through this re-immersion within the

traditional sphere of experience, Ojebeta becomes doubly vulnerable to subordinating sexual customs. She may now have the means to enjoy greater economic privileges, "palm-oil sellers were a class apart" (152), and yet this remains overshadowed by her traditionally inscribed marital destiny: "Every woman, whether slave or free, must marry" (112).

Once again, it is the spirited Ojebeta who resurfaces, shaving off her hair to prevent being forcibly claimed as a wife, according to a sinister tribal custom. As a community member, however, she cannot avoid the fact that she is still bound by principles which equate female freedom with being spurned by society:

No woman or girl in Ibuza was free, except those who committed the abominable sin of prostitution or those who had been completely cast off or rejected by their people for offending one custom or another. (157)

Obiechina states that:

The social and political institutions of the traditional society have perfected the art of exacting conformity from the individual and discouraging deviations and subversion of the common will. In all their workings, these institutions emphasize the primacy of the group over the individuals who compose it.¹⁰

It is, therefore, significant that Ojebeta's defiance is silenced by a fellow African woman,

since this ensures a recognition of female behavioural norms and consequently her own communally-defined position. Even though she still attempts to exert some measure of control over her destiny through her subsequent own choice of husband, this is little more than a hollow self-determinative act, since marriage, in the Christian sense, will only serve to bind her to sexually repressive marital dogma: "Slave, obey your master. Wife, honour your husband, who is your father, your head, your heart, your soul" (173).

To further appreciate the extent of this female powerlessness in the face of "sexual colonization", one need only examine the juxtaposed story of Ma Palagada. In one respect, this female figure would appear to be the young Ojebeta's antithesis, and yet she too is bound to the demands of tradition and society, by virtue of her female gender.

Palagada, like the chief's wife in the slave girl episode, has wealth, influence and social prestige. Though her means to economic self-sufficiency has emerged through a colonial tie, one might well ask whether her illicit relationship with the white man has not perhaps made her the ultimate victor, since this liaison has subsequently afforded her an uncommon degree of economic autonomy: "Ma Palagada in her younger days had been 'kept' by a Portuguese

man...he left Ma a great deal of wealth" (112).

Within traditional Igbo society, however, marketing, which was a feminine preoccupation, accorded women a relative degree of economic independence: "women owned their surplus crops and their market profits".¹¹ Catharine MacKinnon examines whether economic power can be truly equated with female autonomy:

If seizures of state and productive power overturn work relations, they do not overturn sex relations at the same time or in the same way, as a class analysis of sex would...predict. Neither technology nor socialism, both of which purport to alter women's role at the point of production, have ever yet equalized women's status relative to men. In the feminist view, nothing has.¹²

In Ma Palagada's case, a flourishing cloth trade grants her the power needed to subvert the traditional, domestically defined vision of African womanhood. Ownership of slaves further adds to a status informed by business rather than familial achievement. Not even this powerful display of self-assertion can erase, however, the necessity of marriage within the African context. In the traditional sense, this union would involve a woman's loss of individual identity, because of her assumption of the name, gods and interests of her husband and his people. In this instance, society's recognition of Ma's status results in her not only

retaining her maiden name, but also passing it on to all those intimately associated with her, husband included:

So popular and so wealthy, so charitable was she in her Christian beliefs, that anybody connected with her took on the same name. Her domestic slaves were Palagada girls or Palagada men, her children by her two husbands were Palagadas, and even her last husband, who came from over the sea and spoke Ibo in a funny way, was known locally as Pa Palagada. (70)

This unusual submergence of male identity is even further compounded through Ma's sole, financial and material contribution to the upkeep of the family, a responsibility that would have been traditionally shouldered by both husband and wife.

Whilst these expressions of autonomy may appear to subvert traditional male/female expectations in this marriage, they cannot dismiss a fundamental reality - this society's blatant privileging of males. Pa, by virtue of his maleness and paternity of Ma's only son, is thus entitled to absolute patriarchal authority: "It was a known fact that although Ma Palagada was the one who had bought them, they ultimately belonged to Pa Palagada, and whatever he said or ordered would hold" (112). The full extent of his power is made apparent at Ma's death through the patrilineal nature of this society, which designates the exclusive perpetuation of male

concerns:

Even though Ma Palagada's daughters made many claims to her property, it was made clear to them that, although they were welcome to some of Ma's trinkets and some of the servants, her lands and her business were the concern of the males in her life (139)

As a pillar of the community, Ma Palagada, in life, could ill afford to flout social and sexual convention, since her "privileged position" was ultimately derived from successful social interaction with her peers. She thus had to marry and submit to an "actual" degradation of female status, in order to be recognized and accepted as an inherent member of her society. If she, in view of her social and economic power, was finally unable to challenge the pressures of a traditional community, no more can the youthful Ojebeta.

In fact, by the end of the novel, Ojebeta is a far cry from the young girl who valiantly attempted to flee from her captors, when initially forced into slavery. Not only has she now fully assumed a subordinated, Christian female mentality, she must also confront her own society's traditional marital codes. Before she can freely marry Jacob, the man of her choice, she thus feels bound to obtain the permission and blessing of her brothers, one of whom is Okolie, the same brother who initially sold her

into slavery for his own material gain. Defiance is translated into absolute passivity through her subsequent ironic pronouncement following the belated and yet "welcome" bride-price transaction between her husband Jacob and Clifford who, in Ma's absence, is now considered to be her previous owner: "The contract is completed, after all these years. I feel free in belonging to a new master from my very own town Ibuza; my mind is now at rest" (178-9).

Perhaps this outright collusion with oppression is a necessary evil in this society, which now tainted by the alarming effects of colonialism, is unable to return to the relative sanctity of its pristine cultural identity. The slave girl motif highlights this notion, since even though the practice of slavery was an intrinsic part of the African's heritage, it only became a trade of barbaric proportions with the white man's introduction of commerce.

Ojebeta's slave-experience begins with the loss of father and brother, tangible results of colonialism. It is not so much her exposure to slavery that undermines her Umuisagba inheritance but, rather, her cooperation with two mutually "oppressive" systems of belief, traditional and Christian, that irrevocably seals her fate of female bondage.

III. MOTHERHOOD AS INSTITUTION IN *THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD*.

IT WAS AS MOTHER THAT WOMAN WAS FEARSOME;
IT IS IN MATERNITY THAT SHE MUST BE
TRANSFIGURED AND ENSLAVED.¹

Through Ojebeta in *The Slave Girl*, attention was directed towards the African woman's ultimate lack of control over her destiny vis-à-vis the institution of marriage. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, this notion of powerlessness is extended one step further, since emphasis is now directed towards the constraints imposed upon women via the African institution of motherhood. Nnu Ego, the protagonist of this novel, does not represent an idealized image of the African mother, majestically perched upon her male-defined pedestal. She is instead a flesh-and-blood, suffering individual, forced to mediate her consciousness between past beliefs and present circumstance. In fact, the poignancy of this ironically titled novel lies precisely in the heroine's inability to reconcile the traditional, "dignified" notion of mother as blest with its far less flattering urban reality.

For many male African writers, the benign image of mother was a focal point in the struggle against

colonialism and its concomitant cultural implications. Achebe even proclaimed that "the prime duty of the African writer...[was] to reclaim the dignity of his past"; to, in effect, re-invigorate the link between community and its ancestral spirit.² By virtue of this push towards an African sense of national identity motherhood became valorized, but strictly in terms of its metaphoric, not real, significance. Mariamma Bâ states that, "We [women] no longer accept the nostalgic praise to the African mother whom, in his anxiety, man confuses with Mother Africa"³, highlighting the discrepancies that emerge between a male-defined view of motherhood, as opposed to its harsher, female initiated representation.

In this novel, female rage is, therefore, inflamed by a conflict between inner ideals and outward reality, especially in the light of post-colonial disturbances to traditional, familial stability. At the same time, any expression of female revolt is still ultimately tempered by an intrinsic belief in the inviolability of the African past, which equates female worth with reproductive capacity. Through an important link between the slave girl figure, the protagonist, Nnu Ego, and the institution of motherhood, an ironic twist is consequently given to

the slave-girl motif in this novel. This three-fold relationship can be better understood through an examination of the circumstances leading up to the birth of the heroine.

Within the traditional village milieu of Ibuza that marks her birthplace, the law of the father, which is but one manifestation of male privilege along the traditional chain of sexual dominance, sets an unusual precedent. Obi Umunna is a village chief, whose inability to establish a male lineage impels him to relinquish this responsibility to his daughter, Ona, thereby forbidding her a husband, but not sexual relations:

He had maintained that she must never marry; his daughter was never going to stoop to any man. She was free to have men, however, and if she bore a son, he would take her father's name, thereby rectifying the omission nature had made.⁴

Though Ona is a woman bound by her traditional society's definitions of womanhood, she is in this instance ironically prevented from fulfilling one of its principal demands - marriage - forced to participate instead in a perverted form of artificial masculinization. In one respect, her "freedom" from marriage would seem to indicate a reflection of privilege, except that she, like Ma Palagada in *The Slave Girl*, has internalized

society's female expectations. Consequently, an intimate relationship with Agbadi, a powerful, enigmatic village chief, leaves her not only torn between respect for her father and fidelity to her lover, but also strangely secure in the solace of ownership: "she supposed she should regard herself as lucky for two men to want to own her" (25). For Ona, the prospect of motherhood assumes an even more sinister importance, since it typifies not only the lack of control women have over their bodies, but also the central concern of the motherhood process - to produce daughters and sons for a male lineage:

my father wants a son and you have many sons. But you do not have a girl yet. Since my father will not accept any bride price from you, if I have a son he will belong to my father, but if a girl, she will be yours. That is the best I can do for you both. (25)

What is immediately prefigured in the sense of the yet unborn Nnu Ego is her future denied autonomy as either daughter, wife or mother, since she is here already being channelled to serve men's interests. As a child, this prospect of perpetual ownership is externally mirrored through a conflation of human and mythic elements. In the first instance, Agbadi's sustained devotion to her mother Ona, incites society to condemn the latter as both a fiendish influence and the primary cause of Agbadi's senior

wife's death:

People said she had had him bewitched,
that she had a kind of power over him;
what person in his right mind would leave
his big spacious household and women who
were willing to worship and serve him in
all things to go after a rude, egocentric
woman who had been spoilt by her father?
(12)

A slave girl, subsequently sacrificed at this senior wife's burial according to traditional custom, vows to return as Agbadi's legitimate daughter. With the birth of Nnu Ego, superstition is translated into reality. An unusual, painful lump is detected on the back of her head and is interpreted by the *dibia* as a sure sign of the reincarnated slave.

Whilst Nnu Ego is, from an early age, dramatically "recognized" as a victim of male oppression, she is also associated with notions of female defiance, as reflected through the symbolic meaning of the slave girl's re-manifested, physical lump. Within the traditional context, however, the latter aspect does not readily emerge, because of Nnu Ego's conformity to the principles of "perfect" wifehood. Her hopes of attaining this state are initially based upon a traditional belief that virginity is an external assurance of a future, fruitful marriage: "When a woman is virtuous, it is easy for her to conceive" (31). When she fails to conceive, however, it is not

her virginity that is questioned, but her slave girl heritage:

It had become her problem and hers alone. She went from one *dibia* to another in secret, and was told the same thing - that the slave woman who was her *chi* would not give her a child because she had been dedicated to a river goddess before Agbadi took her away in slavery. (31)

The ironic implications of this revelation need to be elucidated.

Dedication to the river goddess sets the female figure above the mundane social practices of marriage and motherhood. Nnu Ego, as presumably the slave girl's incarnation, is similarly "blest". Rather than accept this privileged position, she pleads with her *chi* for its removal, ironically yearning instead for the state of motherhood, which will only serve to reduce her to the status of slave. The tension between the slave girl's story and Nnu Ego's stems thus from the fact that whilst the former was outwardly enslaved by male forces, the latter will become a victim of male-defined traditions, by virtue of her own inner collusion with oppression through motherhood. In a subsequent dream, the *chi* figure is to mock Nnu Ego's wholehearted embrace of this yoke of enslavement, a "choice" which she should have, by rights, gladly declined:

.. 'Yes, take the dirty, chubby [boy] babies. You can have as many of those as you want. Take them.' She had laughed and her laughter was ghostly as she disappeared into the grove of thick forest that bordered the stream. (77-78)

Why then is the prospect of motherhood so integral to Nnu Ego's feminine consciousness? According to Katherine Frank:

The African woman without children is clearly better off dead, for she has no intrinsic value of her own. The only power a woman possesses is her procreative power, and if she is unable to exercise it she is deemed useless and expendable, both in her own eyes and those of her culture.⁵

Whilst procreative ability is not actually the woman's sole means of power, in view of her relative economic independence, it is nonetheless, of overriding importance to her sensibility. There is thus a startling difference between Nnu Ego's self-flagellation, "she was failing everybody" (31), and her grandfather's dismissal of his lack of male lineage as simply an "omission nature had made" (12). This disparity between male/female attitudes highlights the fact that within traditional African society, "womanhood is defined exclusively as motherhood".⁶ As such, women are divested of personal worth, their role simply defined in terms of a biological duty to "male immortality". In Nnu Ego's case, her barrenness nullifies the marriage, the bride price is returned and a new husband is

sought.

Whilst the traditional stigma attached to the condition of barrenness cannot be condoned, note how it is compensated by the childless wife's right to return to her father's compound:

Agbadi took his daughter home. Most of his wives, now elderly, were sympathetic and nursed her mentally back to normal. They made her feel that even though she had not borne a child, her father's house was bursting with babies she could regard as her own. (35)

The urban environment in which colonial influences are now rampant proves much less supportive. There, the female's traditional, protective structures are eroded, leaving only stern reminders of tribal taboos. Nnu Ego's second marriage takes her to this more malignant context of urban Lagos, where her first baby's death almost drives her to suicide. The sole concern of the native onlookers is not her anguish, but her disreputable abscondence from her wifely and possible future maternal responsibilities: "What are you trying to do to your husband, your father, your people...You are shaming your womanhood" (61). Herein lies the essential dialectic of the novel - Nnu Ego's continued enslavement to traditional principles and taboos in the face of a hostile colonial society, which demands that the native adapt, not preserve an

indigenous cultural consciousness. Fanon asserts that:

colonialism...[does] not seek to be considered by the native as a gentle, loving mother who protects her child from a hostile environment, but rather as a mother who unceasingly restrains her fundamentally perverse offspring...from giving free rein to its evil instincts.⁷

Within this extreme social climate, the indigene is thus torn between the preservation of a traditionally born sense of identity and outward collusion with the white man's culturally unsympathetic stance. Since the latter is crucial to survival within the urban context, a gradual disintegration of the "native self" is initiated.

These hybrid tensions emerge in Nnu Ego's first meeting with Nnaife, her new husband. For him, adaptation to a white, urban society has demanded a superficial rejection of traditional male/female roles. Whilst he has gladly accepted domestic servitude to a white couple in the hope of future social advancement, in his home, tradition still reigns supreme. He thus purchases Nnu Ego through payment of the traditional bride price, demands his conjugal rights like any traditional husband, and expects his familial life to proceed according to strictly defined, rural customs of male/female behaviour.

Nnu Ego's immediate reaction to his appearance and profession as washerman is, however, one of revulsion against a picture of manhood so contrary to the traditional ideal:

His hair, unlike that of men at home in Ibuza, was not closely shaved; he left a lot of it on his head, like that of a woman mourning for her husband. His skin was pale...And his clothes - Nnu Ego had never seen men dressed like that: khaki shorts with holes and an old, loose, white singlet...Why, marrying such a jelly of a man would be like living with a middle-aged woman! (42)

She was used to tall, wiry farmers, with rough, blackened hands from farming, long, lean legs and very dark skin. (43)

Distance from home now binds her to Naife, consequently preventing her from exercising a traditional right accorded the African woman:

If you had dared come to my father's compound to ask for me, my brothers would have thrown you out. My people only let me come to you here because they thought you were like your brother, not like this. (49)

When consolation is sought from her neighbour, Cordelia, Naife's physical image is related to that of colonized males in general:

Men here are too busy being white men's servants to be men. We women mind the home. Not our husbands. Their manhood has been taken away from them. The shame of it is that they don't know it. All they see is the money, shining white man's money. (51)

"If the native male's traditional sense of masculine integrity is thus eroded, what of the African female? Micere Mugo believes that,

In capitalist systems, women tend to be exploited by the very nature of the society, particularly the working and peasant women, just as men are exploited. The difference is that women are hit particularly hard. Their most obvious hardship is being educationally disadvantaged.⁸

Whilst native "simplicity" certainly fosters Nnu Ego's oppression within this foreign environment, it does not undermine her innate resilience and ability to cope with the new urban pressures of motherhood. In fact, when the onset of the Second World War results in Nnaife being drafted, she successfully assumes all responsibility for feeding and maintaining herself and her children. Here again, the sinister impact of colonialism is evinced, since Nnu Ego is outwardly stripped of both her father's and husband's support - an echo of Ojebeta's somewhat, similar plight in *The Slave Girl*.

According to Steady, "True feminism is an abnegation of male protection and a determination to be resourceful and self-reliant".⁹ In a court scene that appears towards the end of the novel, Nnu Ego is asked to clarify whether Nnaife's material responsibilities to his family have been adequately

fulfilled. Through her response, she unwittingly establishes beyond doubt how she has herself consistently discharged both male and female marital roles:

'Well, your second son is at St Gregory's. Who pays his fees?'

'I do, I pay his fees with the profits I make from selling firewood and other things'...

'But your husband told us he pays the school fees, how is that?'

'Yes, he pays the school fees...Nnaife is the head of our family. He owns me, just like God in the sky owns us. So even though I pay the fees, yet he owns me. So in other words he pays.' (216-217)

A deconstructionist reading of *The Joys of Motherhood* could, therefore, quite rightly interpret Nnu Ego's valiant and, for the most part, lone struggle against the debilitating circumstances of an urban existence as a powerful reflection of these feminist ideals.

Why then does this potentially liberating expression of self-sufficiency not incite her to break out of the traditional African female mould? If she is enslaved to sexual ideals which place the man, proud, strong and virile, at the head of his household, his wife, content through the privilege of motherhood, she cannot now remain immune from the impact of colonialism:

Now each was in a different world. There

.. was no time for petting or talking to each other about love. That type of family awareness which the illiterate farmer was able to show his wives, his household, his compound, had been lost in Lagos, for the job of the white man, for the joy of buying expensive lappas, and for the feel of shiny trinkets. (52)

Colonial factors have not only stripped the African woman of the traditional privileges of motherhood and eroded its built-in traditional supports, but also, through the instigation of far more pressing physical, social and economic concerns, replaced its "joys" with endless struggle. This brutal urban reality is compounded in the novel by the persistence of the African polygamous marital system, which may have been an intrinsic feature of the village sphere, but is hardly congenial to the cramped, impoverished conditions of an urban environment. When Naife consequently inherits his brother's widow, Adaku and later marries another girl, Okpo, Nnu Ego and her children are adversely affected and yet she continues to conform to the direct demands of a senior-wife status: "she was determined to play the role of the mature senior wife" (123-4).

Nnu Ego's unswerving dedication to the ideals of African wifehood and motherhood is facilitated, in fact, through the event of, not one, but seven separate instances of childbearing, which fulfil her

belief that her "*chi* has consented to the marriage" (50). Through her children, in particular her sons, she thus becomes permanently indebted to Naife, entrenched in the traditional view that esteems his maleness as the key to her female perfection: "He has made me into a real woman" (53). Her *chi* has, however, mockingly urged her to accept "dirty, chubby [boy] babies", a qualified and gendered distinction that ironically prefigures the ultimate hollowness of this maternal enslavement. In this hostile environment, the traditional favouring of sons will not reap the expected maternal returns - sons that will care for and support her in old age. Nnu Ego sacrifices not only the quality of her own life, but also that of her daughters, so as to enable her sons to benefit from the white man's education. It is precisely this learning that will alienate them from the responsibility of traditional concerns, leaving their parents to flounder in poverty and privation.

When her oldest son, Oshia, abandons his family for the opportunity of further overseas education, Nnu Ego is thus forced to settle for a diminished picture of maternal contentment, which remains informed nonetheless by a futile belief in her own complementary right to social prestige:

.. Her joy was to know that she had brought up her children when they had started out with nothing, and that those same children might rub shoulders one day with the great men of Nigeria. (202)

Here, the realization of her actual female reality vis-à-vis motherhood is finally beginning to surface:

Friends and well-wishers were surprised to see that she did not cry; and when they predicted that soon her son would be back and driving her about in a big car, she knew that they had all missed the point. She was not destined to be such a mother. She realised that now. (201-202)

This capacity for self-awareness develops further through exposure to her co-wife's revolt against tradition.

The relationship between Nnu Ego and this figure, Adaku, presents a more strikingly antithetical link than that between Ma Palagada and Obejeta in *The Slave Girl*. In several respects, Adaku is still exposed to typical African female circumstance, marriage and motherhood. What distinguishes her from Nnu Ego is her inability to produce sons, the birth of two daughters failing to placate society's demands of womanhood. She is thus left open to social abuse and excluded from certain traditional marks of respect:

I'm going to be thrown away when I'm dead...whereas people like you, senior

- wife, have formed roots, as they say: you will be properly buried in Nnaife's compound. (169)

In a dispute between the two wives, where Nnu Ego is at fault, the male arbiters make "Adaku feel that since she [has] no son for the family she [has] no right to complain about her senior's conduct" (166). This condemnation urges her to adopt the only form of female autonomy available within the traditional/urban context, prostitution, even though this will provoke automatic social suicide for her and her daughters:

'I will spend the money I have in giving my girls a good start in life They shall stop going to the market with me. I shall see that they get enrolled in a good school'...
'No Ibuza man will marry girls brought up by a prostitute.' (168)

Frank believes that this self-determinative act merely transforms Adaku into a "[victim] of sexual slavery", thereby, adding another dimension to the slave girl motif of the novel.¹⁰ Yet, as Frank also admits, she "makes her slavery pay and selects her oppressors, so she gains some measure of power and control over life".¹¹ Whilst this seems to echo Ojebeta's similar decision to choose her own master in *The Slave Girl*, male presence is in this instance a transitory necessity. Furthermore, through her decision to educate her daughters, rather than

prepare them for a future of domestic servitude, she paves the way for the subsequent emergence of a new, far more liberated generation of African women. In many respects, Adaku could, therefore, be considered as "a forerunner of women's liberation in Africa".¹²

Whilst there may be no hope of salvation for Nnu Ego and her daughters, who have merely been groomed to continue in their mother's footsteps, she, as a figure capable of self-awareness, is able to realize the possible implications of this birth of new, female values:

'I am beginning to think that there may be a future for educated women. I saw many young women teaching in schools. It would be really something for a woman to be able to earn some money monthly like a man,' Nnu Ego said looking into the distance. (189)

Since she is here still looking towards the future, one is aware of her ultimate inability to now alter the precepts by which she has moulded her own life, "I don't know how to be anything else but a mother" (222). Ironically, it is this enslavement to a singular, traditional vision that is the means of her own undoing - her two older sons abandon her for the sake of education, one of her daughters marries outside of traditional norm and Nnaife is imprisoned as a result of a blundering attempt to revenge his children's infidelity to their parents. His

imprisonment forces Nnu Ego to return to her own father's tribal compound, instead of, by rights, "enjoying" the respect of her husband's people, whom she has "blessed" with a male lineage.

Even when her subsequent lonely, estranged death by a roadside is "rewarded" by a grand, costly second burial, ironically arranged by Oshia, her ambitious, oldest son, it is an unconvincing show of respect, since one cannot overlook the deprivation that has marked her long arduous life. If any testament is to be left in the name of Nnu Ego, perhaps it should be her valiant and effective ability to discharge both the traditional male and female roles within the extremely challenging urban context, since even though this has undermined any expression of female revolt, it has demonstrated, nonetheless, an indomitable quality of female spirit.

IV. THRUST TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE IN SECOND-CLASS CITIZEN.

FEMININITY IS THE VIRTUE OF THE
TRADITIONALIST; FEMINISM, THE VENEER OF
THE PROGRESSIVE STRIVING TO BECOME A MAN.¹

In the light of African society's bias towards "communalism, [which] implies a standard of value of submergence rather than self-realization", one might well ask whether the African woman can in fact successfully sever her self-defeating links with the past, since this would only serve to alienate her from an African sense of being.²

In the case of Ojebeta and Nnu Ego, this conflict was, in many respects, subdued from within by the pressure of the "group over the individual" mentality. The slavish education received by Ojebeta thus only served to further reinforce, rather than refute, her acquiescence in traditional forms of female oppression. Whilst Nnu Ego was placed within an urban context, she was unable to sufficiently adapt her traditionally oriented attitudes. In fact, her fidelity towards the traditional privileging of males made her directly compliant with the denial of education to herself and her daughters, thereby

undermining the prospect of release from subordinating female norms. Though each was placed within a different social context, neither was, therefore, ultimately able to resist a cultural destiny, inextricably bound to the institutions of marriage and motherhood, predicaments that were noticeably exacerbated as a result of the colonial impact.

The fate of Adah, the heroine of *Second-Class Citizen*, is similarly prescribed, except that now the female has access, through her own vigorous efforts, to scholarly education and, in the latter stages, a non-African social context. These two factors will be instrumental to the native woman's enunciation of her rage against oppression and subsequent thrust towards independence. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's criticism of the role of a missionary as opposed to scholarly-based education is applicable to both the male's and female's situation: "missionary...education was not aimed at a knowledge of self and the reality of the black man's place in the world".³ Wilhelmina Lamb observes that education is "the crucial liberating force in the lives of Enecheta's heroines...their degree of servitude [being] inversely proportional to the amount of education they receive".⁴ Whilst this is a

certainly valid assumption in the case of the educated and ambitious Adah, it is not the sole determinant involved in her realization of autonomy.

This can be better understood through a brief examination of an interim female figure, whose access to education is not synonymous with "freedom", because of the persistence of traditional female constraints within a supposedly "modern" African context. She is Nko, the heroine of Emecheta's *Double Yoke*, an African campus novel, cleverly titled so as to imply a tension between the pull of tradition and the push towards modernity, "of having to carry the old yoke of motherhood and wifhood with the new academic one".⁵ In this instance, education may no longer be an exclusive male privilege, but even this accomodation to Western influences cannot efface repressive sexual myths that continue to bind women to the subordinating tendencies of tradition: "An educated girl these days was not expected just to be a financial asset to her husband, but had to be so to her family as well" (96). Nko is, in effect, caught at the crossroads between the future and the past, eager in one respect to taste previously unimaginable female experiences and yet drawn to the security of her mother's inheritance, which left women with few choices other than the traditional:

.. When I was your age, all I was thinking of was how to go the the fattening room and make myself round and beautiful for your father. I did not have to sit up night after night with no sleep; I did not have to eat just oranges to keep myself thin; I did not even have to look for a husband...You may call us ignorant, but we were happy and contented in our ignorance.
(94-95)

Through this reference to a "contented" past, one is immediately alerted to Spivak's remark, which cautions the critic to be wary in making Western-defined value judgements of native life, without any real idea of indigenous attitudes towards tradition.⁶

To return to Adah, the protagonist of *Second-Class Citizen*, one finds that she resembles Nko through her initial entrenchment within the surviving traditional customs and attitudes of African society. What distinguishes these two heroines is that Adah's exposure to Western education and its associated influences leaves her more responsive to the prospect of both self-development and self-assertion. Accordingly, the slave-girl motif in this novel is less pronounced, serving only to imply the forthcoming emergence of a "new" African woman:

When Pa's mother was dying, she had promised Pa that she would come again, this time as his daughter. She was sorry she could not bring him up. She died when Pa was only five. She would come again, she had promised, to compensate for leaving him so young. Well, Pa grew up and

.. married Ma at the Christ Church in Lagos, which was a Christian church. Ma had a girl. Pa thought Adah was the very picture of his... 'come back mother'. So she was loaded with strings of names: 'Nne nna', 'Adah nna', 'Adah Eze'! Adah Eze means Princess, daughter of a king.⁷

Through the reincarnation imagery of this narrative, "grandmother to daughter", emphasis is immediately directed towards Adah's future, traditionally inscribed, maternal and domestic destiny. In fact, her initial sense of self-worth, "Princess, daughter of a king", will be attacked through the institution of marriage and motherhood, which will reduce her, like Nnu Ego, to the status of female slave.

The grandmother's denied fulfillment of maternal obligations has a symbolic significance for the young Adah. She, like her predecessor, will marry and experience motherhood, but will refuse to abide solely by its supposed singular importance to female life. Her mental, emotional and social outlook will not, therefore, be governed by an exclusive concern with children and the mothering role as defined by African tradition, but rather, by an important vision of selfhood and self-development. Central to the female struggle within this novel will thus be the notion of burgeoning female independence from within, rather than its emphatic suppression from without. The external London context that features within this novel will in this sense be crucial to

the active manifestation of revolt, since an African milieu still ultimately undermines the prospect of autonomy, as noted in the case of Nko.

In many respects, Adah's thirst for education is an unusual African female phenomenon, given the relatively traditional context of her familial and social upbringing. As a child, she is not only inculcated with the stringent ideologies of a typically hierarchized African society, but also rudely alerted to her own supposed insignificance within the scheme of the male/female social order:

She was a girl who arrived when everyone was expecting and predicting a boy. So, since she was such a disappointment to her parents, to her immediate family, to her tribe, nobody thought of recording her birth. (7)

In the face of this perverse social climate, female divergence from usual behavioural norms is clearly discouraged through the mother/daughter relationship. From an early age, Adah's inclination towards education is thus offset by her mother's tacit acknowledgement of her inevitable domestic fate:

Even if she was sent to school, it was very doubtful whether it would be wise to let her stay long. 'A year or two would do, as long as she can write her name and count. Then she will learn to sew.' (9)

Whilst the Christian missionary training of women is left unchallenged, commenced even prior to legitimate school-age admission, formal scholarly education is distinctly regarded as a male privilege. Adah refuses to succumb to this belief, secretly eluding her mother in order to taste forbidden pleasures of school life. The intensity of her childhood protest against this hallowed tradition signals an important development in the African woman, whose rage against repressive male-defined traditions now refuses to be silenced by the rhetoric of sexual exclusivity. Ironically, it is Adah's mother who is punished for her daughter's impulsive behaviour and charged with "child neglect" (12), even though she herself, by virtue of her rigid traditional outlook, can in no way be considered as a contrary female influence.

Why then is Adah drawn, in the first place, to the prospect of Western education? According to JanMohamed:

the dominant model of power-and interest-relations in all colonial societies is the manichean opposition between the putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native.⁸

Urban Lagos, Adah's birthplace and home, is caught in the grips of the social upheaval that is associated with colonial domination. As such, the

township is characterized by an important dialectical tension - the sanctity of the old laws of the traditionalist versus the foreign superimposed laws of the white man:

Her parents said that Lagos was a bad place...because it was a town with laws, a town where Law ruled supreme. In Ibuza, they said, you took the law into your own hands...Lagos was bad because this type of behaviour was not allowed. You had to learn to control your temper, which Adah was taught was against the law of nature.
(8)

Whilst the valorization of tradition is central to the antagonism between these two forces, the internalization of colonial dogma is so subtly achieved that the native's "rejection" of self is gladly accepted as the point of departure from savagery to civilization. As Fanon states, "the colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards".⁹ One of these "cultural standards" centres upon the acquisition of Western education, which is regarded as the principal means of achieving social success: "Ibos...were then highly motivated by the middle-class values" (9).

Adah's first awareness of a native reverence for the colonial tongue is through her contact with her younger brother's school: "Children were not taught Yoruba or any African language. This was why it was

such an expensive school. The proprietress was trained in the United Kingdom" (9). Her immediate response of envy is fuelled, however, by more than just her exclusion from school on the basis of sex. It is, rather, a natural compulsion in terms of this society's relative obsequiousness towards Western definitions of worth.

Since "language [is] the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated", its prioritization, by way of an English-based education, is ultimately essential to any subversion of the colonizer/colonized status quo.¹⁰ The arrival of the area's first English-trained black African lawyer, Nweze, is thus seen in terms of his future defence of native concerns: he would "fight for the rights of the people of Ibuza" (8). This Caliban-like revolt still cannot undermine at this stage the authority of the margin/centre psychological phenomenon, which deems the title "been-to" (England) as the pinnacle of native success.¹¹

Adah is thus understandably drawn to the pursuit of education and a UK-based existence, even though the most insistent challenge to the realization of this dream rests within the limitations of her feminine African gender. Though the changing face of this society may initially allow her childhood

desire for learning to be granted, it is only a temporary privilege in view of this community's continuing hold over her destiny. Here, too, it is the "group over the individual" mentality that subverts her spirited resistance against self-enslavement. Her rejection of her mother, which serves to alienate her from other African women, signals, nonetheless, an important inner refusal to abide by a communally-defined African female identity:

these experiences with Ma so early in life...had given her such a very low opinion of her own sex...Women still made Adah nervous. They had a way of sapping her self-confidence. (12)

When Pa dies, initiating the customary parcelling out of mother, daughter and son to existing male relatives, Adah is forced to come to terms with this conflict between her personal aspirations and her pre-ordained female future. She is now not only an unpaid slave in her Uncle's family, economically valued for her education in terms of future bride price agreements, but also constantly faced with the threat of marriage and stifled learning possibilities for the sake of Ma and her brother.

It is at this point that the bond between Adah and tradition is fractured. In *The Slave Girl*, Christian biblical "truth" unwittingly reinforced the African

woman's collusion with her own oppression. In Adah's case, an open-minded response to biblical rhetoric encourages her to adapt her African heritage to what would appear to be "liberating" Christian principles: "she was sure there was a place in the Bible where it said that one could be as clever as the serpent but as harmless as the dove" (22). She thus uses deceit to secure the opportunity of furthering her education at secondary level, even suffering the consequences of a brutal beating to quieten her Christianized conscience:

Adah was given two shillings to buy a pound of steak from a market...All she needed to take the entrance examination to the school of her dreams was two shillings...Adah buried the money and went back home in tears, without the meat. (22)

She did not mind...caning because she knew that anybody who sinned must be punished...After a hundred and three strokes...she was, in fact, very happy. She had earned the two shillings. (23)

This "triumph" is still unable to stave off the necessity of marriage:

Well, there was one thing she had not bargained for. To read for a degree, to read for the entrance examination, or even for more 'A' levels, one needed a home...In Lagos, at that time, teenagers were not allowed to live by themselves, and if the teenager happened to be a girl as well, living alone would be asking for trouble. In short, Adah had to marry. (25)

In *The Slave Girl*, Ojebeta's "choice" of partner was propelled by haste and consequently limited to a solitary figure. In Adah's case, alienation from family allows her greater flexibility of choice, which is consequently directed on the basis of her own needs and desires:

Francis was a very quiet young man who was reading to be an accountant. Adah congratulated herself on her marriage...To Adah the greatest advantage was that she could go on studying at her own pace. (25)

Francis, despite his seeming thirst for education and associated middle-class values, remains "pure African" (30) in outlook. He is thus encouraged by his father to profit from Adah's "modern" educational talents, whilst maintaining a firm grip upon the usual male privileges within the traditional marital structure: "Let her go and work for a million Americans and bring their money here, into this house. It is your luck. You made a good choice in marriage, son" (26).

At first glance, it appears that the forces of tradition have finally tamed Adah's rebellious tendencies. She is now not only married, but also strangely acquiescent in her traditionally designated role of African wife, mother and "economic provider":

-- Adah did not mind in the least being saddled with all these responsibilities...she was to feed herself and the children...pay the rent and help in paying the school fees of Francis' seven sisters...and in the evening be made love to. (27-28)

This about-face cleverly conceals, however, her own subtle manipulation of circumstance. She may be denied female autonomy according to the dictates of African tradition, but she knows that Francis is her sole means of reaching her final destination - the United Kingdom. Consequently, even though she must first accede to his lone departure for the UK, strategy soon convinces her in-laws of the necessity of her similar "temporary" sojourn in England:

'Think of it, Ma - Francis in his big American car and I in my small one, coming to visit you and Pa when you retire. You'll be the envy of all your friends...And when I come back, I shall earn more than double what I'm earning now'. Adah won over her mother-in-law. (35)

'My going to England would be regarded as leave without pay.' That softened Pa. (36)

Though this removal from an African context is essential to the final severing of her ties with tradition, the very fact of her marriage to a "typical" African male delays its automatic fruition. To Francis, a wife is akin to property, valued solely for her domestic, sexual, maternal and in Adah's case, economic capabilities:

.. To him, a woman was a second-class human, to be slept with at any time, even during the day, and, if she refused, to have sense beaten into her until she gave in; to be ordered out of bed after he had done with her; to make sure she washed his clothes and got his meals ready at the right time. (181)

Here again, it is the African woman who bears the brunt of her husband's eroded sense of male dignity, a concomitant of the colonial impact. Within the traditional context, Francis' violent behavioural impulses towards Adah would not have been permitted. Fathers, brothers and even female friends would have provided protection against physical abuse, with the wife even having access to a severance of the marriage agreement. Here, Adah's options are at first limited by an ignorance of English support systems, forcing her to yield to Francis' "corrupted" native identity.

The African is now on foreign soil, his cultural "inadequacies" blatantly reinforced through the imposition of a second-class status, which bars him from the realization of a socially meaningful existence. This is how Fanon dramatizes this destruction of native consciousness:

I begin to suffer from not being a white man to the degree that the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonized native, robs me of all worth, all individuality, tells me that I am a parasite on the world, that I must bring myself as quickly as possible into step

- with the white world.¹²

For Francis, "adaptation" to this alien context involves the absolute acceptance of his supposed inferior status. Even though this only serves to bind him to a diminished social position, it ensures, nonetheless, a perverse form of communal identity with fellow African immigrants. He is thus quick to point out to Adah her abrupt change in circumstance, relying upon her similar sense of traditionalism to quieten any show of defiance:

He spat out in anger: 'You must know, my dear young lady, that in Lagos you may be a million publicity officers for the Americans; you may be earning a million pounds a day; you may have hundreds of servants: you may be living like an élite, but the day you land in England, you are a second-class citizen. So you can't discriminate against your own people, because we are all second-class'. (42-43)

It is this defeatist mentality on his part that signals the final alienation of wife from husband.

From childhood, Adah's individualistic tendencies blossomed in spite of the pressures of a communally-based existence: her pursuit of education, her dream of living in the UK and her "self-propelled choice" in marriage. In fact, one might well claim that these self-assertive impulses developed through her traditionally subordinated position:

Children, especially girls, were taught to

.. be very useful very early in life, and this had its advantages. For instance, Adah learned very early to be responsible for herself. (19)

Though marriage to Francis appears to have curbed these tendencies towards selfhood, it cannot efface her inclinations towards self-definition. Her first step towards a rejection of the restrictions imposed on the basis of sex is consequently through an inner divorce from ingrained notions of gender inequality:

My sons will learn to treat their wives as people, individuals, not like goats that have been taught to talk. My daughters...God help me, nobody is going to pay any bleeding price for them. They will marry because they love and respect their men, not because they are looking for the highest bidder. (133)

In many respects, it is this refusal to yield before both a traditional and now second-class mentality that causes Adah to suffer at the hands of her husband and immediate English-based African community. She is physically and emotionally abused by Francis, ostracized by the latter and also punished by both for attempting to move beyond the confines of her socially allotted and racially defined position:

To most of her Nigerian neighbours, she was having her cake and eating it. She was in a white man's job...She would not send her children away to be fostered like everybody else; instead they were living with them, just as if she and Francis were first-class citizens, in their own

-- country. (75)

Whilst Nnu Ego, by virtue of her "native" ignorance, illiteracy and internalization of society's expectations, would have been easily reduced to conformity in this instance, Adah's determination to succeed remains undaunted. Since this is finally traceable to the innate resilience that is common to both of these heroines, Adah's future realization of success is ensured. She now has a "white man's job" in a library, instead of an "African's job" in a factory, precisely because of a Nnu Ego-like inner resourcefulness and her own educational talents. This is not to say that her intrinsic belief in her own self-importance is not challenged through the effects of both white and black initiated racial abuse, only that now, she has access to external, albeit alien, communal supports. Childcare, maternity leave and wider educational and job opportunities provide her with the means for future liberation from Francis.

This realization urges her to stand up to his insistence upon her supposed female insignificance and also hardens her against the stigma of native inferiority, as defined by society. In fact, her exposure to white humanity in all of its various guises now only serves to alert her to the ironic reality of her racially defined inferior status:

"There were bad whites and good whites, just as there were bad blacks and good blacks! Why, then, did they claim to be superior?" (58). Her subsequent psychological severance from both traditional and colonial forms of oppression reaches its climax through a symbolic nightmarish dream. A heavily pregnant Adah is faced with the fear of a caesarean birth and an associated threat to her own life. Just prior to an anaesthetically induced sleep, mental anguish tears her between the comfort of either Christian or native religion, with Francis, personified as Lucifer in opposition to St Peter, guardian of heaven's gates.

From childhood, Adah has never merely absorbed Christian or tribal dogma without questioning its validity or sexual hypocrisies. Now, knowledge that neither ideological avenue can ultimately bring self-fulfillment leaves her both confused and in despair: "To run to Peter, trouble; to run to Francis trouble" (118). The importance of this double recognition is that it now enables her to voice her inner rage and announce her forthcoming revolt, signalling a significant movement towards a complete state of self-reliance: "I hate you now, Francis, and one day I shall leave you" (133).

Note the link between this outward manifestation

of female rebellion and her enforced hospital fellowship with mothers, loved and cherished as fellow and not inferior beings:

Those women...seemed to be telling her to look around her, that there were still many beautiful things to be seen, which she had not seen, that there were still several joys to be experienced which she had not yet experienced, that she was still young, that her whole life was still ahead of her. (121)

Here, exposure to an English female mentality enables her to assume an important "*prise de conscience*", which makes her even more responsive to the prospect of her own liberation.¹³ It is this access to "atypical" models of womanhood and female supports that further distinguishes the English context from its African equivalent:

She met a West Indian girl who had had a baby girl by a Nigerian; but the man had not married her because, according to him, the child was not his. It was this girl who showed Adah that you could live on what was called the Assistance until your children grew up and you could get a job. (175)

Consequently, when she is finally driven to leaving Francis and faced with its brutal physical repercussions, "she had been so bruised and maltreated that she could not see herself going to work for a week or two" (190), she is sufficiently knowledgeable of her rights as an "English" citizen

to seek legal "dissolution" of her marriage. This is an important mark of her blossoming inner autonomy, since within the traditional context, she would have been dependent upon her father or brothers who are, by rights, the married woman's principal means of protection from an abusive husband.

Note that what finally propels her resolute abandonment of Francis in this instance is her first attempt, as a writer, to come to terms with her own reality: "Adah...put everything [in the story] that was lacking in her marriage" (180). According to Elleke Boehmer: "To write is not only to speak for one's place in the world. It is also to *make* one's own place or narrative, to tell the story of oneself, to create an identity".¹⁴ Through this act of self-definition, Adah is able to fully acknowledge her sometimes suppressed but nonetheless insistent desire for female independence. Even though her final valedictory statement implies an awareness of forthcoming confrontations in her even more daunting role as a single, black African, working mother, her expression of triumphant achievement and continued defiance points to the potential realization of a successful future, uninhibited by the traditional constraints of gender:

- She was different. Her children were going to be different. They were all going to be black, they were going to enjoy being black, be proud of being black, a black of a different breed. (154)

V. CONCLUSION

Throughout this focalized study of Emecheta's novels, the bond between the individual, society and tradition has remained crucial to an understanding of the African woman's vulnerability to outward and self-induced forms of oppression. According to Obiechina, this three-pronged relationship derives its vitality from a compartmentalized African vision: "the individual cannot see himself outside of the status which he holds in society; the others cannot see him independently of this status".¹

Whilst this may seem to imply a fixed social reality, there is certainly some scope for digressive female behaviour, as evinced through the characters of Ma Palagada in *The Slave Girl*, Adaku in *The Joys of Motherhood* and finally Adah in *Second-Class Citizen*. Even if Ma Palagada's outward display of autonomy is ultimately superficial, one cannot ignore the power and authority she is shown to wield as a woman within the female-based and, female-governed market community: "the sophisticated, rich, fat mammy traders...formed the backbone of Onitsha market" (57). In this position, she is not only respected and envied, but also placed in an important leadership role, as she is flatteringly informed by a fellow market trader: "We

look towards people like you...to help us" (132).

Adaku similarly acquires prestige through her trading ability. Despite Frank's assertion that her choice of prostitution undermines the quality of her female independence, the image of Adaku that subsequently emerges in the novel is certainly not aligned with notions of victimization or abuse:

Adaku...told Nnu Ego that she was giving up selling beans and peppers, she was buying a larger stall on which she would have abada material for lappas...she was leasing...her former stall to...someone who would pay her yearly.

'That will take care of my rent, at least,' she finished, laughing.

'You mean you won't have to depend on men friends to do anything for you?'

'No,' she replied. 'I want to be a dignified single woman.' (170)

In both *The Slave Girl* and *The Joys of Motherhood*, it is thus an antithetical figure to the heroine who is able to rise above the subordinating tendencies of African society. This situation is only reversed in *Second-Class Citizen* when the protagonist gains access to education, as well as removal from the colonized African context. To appreciate fully the forces behind this progression, some of the central issues explored in this thesis will be briefly reiterated.

Within each novel examined, the African woman is bound to the past through the institutions of

marriage and motherhood. Whilst the nature of this cultural destiny is metaphorically conveyed through Emecheta's recurring slavery motif, it is, at the same time, informed by gestures of defiance, which define the reactions of the respective heroines against intrusive, oppositional forces. In *The Slave Girl*, Ojebeta's resistance to tradition is repeatedly expressed through defiant actions, but it is her voluntary acquiescence in patriarchal definitions of womanhood that finally silences revolt: "To be owned by a man is a great honour" (158). Nnu Ego's conformity to the institution of motherhood is also dictated by an ingrained respect for male-defined social and sexual values, although she, unlike Ojebeta, is ultimately capable of self-awareness: "I am a prisoner of my own flesh and blood....What have I gained from all this? Yes, I have many children, but what do I have to feed them on? On my life." (186-187). Moreover, throughout her marriage in Lagos, she has shown herself perfectly capable of survival without the protective male figure ordained by traditional mores.

Traditional African beliefs should not be dismissed as inherently oppressive, however, since both of these heroines are forced to suffer the effects of colonialism's eroding influences. In Ojebeta's case, the loss of traditional safeguards

is a direct result of the colonially provoked deaths of her father and brother. Moreover, acquiescence in her marital destiny is compounded through her exposure to Christian education.

With urban migration, a disintegration of native systems condemns the traditionalist to a cultural void, since neither the past nor the present is able to offer effective support or security. Whilst Nnu Ego's rage may thus be initially directed towards the overwhelming traditional demands imposed upon motherhood, it is, in reality, inflamed by the pressures of an urban existence. She is obliged to accept the emasculated Naife as husband, and all the demands of traditional wifedom with none of the traditional supports.

Even when the African woman is finally released from her cycle of bondage, as in the case of Adah, it is tempered by Emecheta's own realization that though "women now dare to break with tradition, [it is] sometimes at great cost to themselves".² Whilst Adah's final break from Francis is preceded by much physical and mental suffering, she must in fact renounce her cultural identity in order to secure an autonomous female existence. Is Adah, in view of this personal cost, an exceptional figure who simply chooses to divorce herself from tradition, or rather an ordinary African woman pushed towards this

extreme measure in view of extraordinary cultural circumstance?

Through what has thus far been glimpsed of the traditional African context, one could certainly highlight causes for concern - the slavery and slave girl sacrifice in *The Slave Girl*, the stigma of barrenness in *The Joys of Motherhood* and the unfair dismissal of Adah's ambitions on the basis of gender in *Second-Class Citizen*. Whilst these factors point to a far from ideal social context, do they, however, automatically indicate an oppressive sociological structure? Evans-Pritchard believes that:

from the outside and from our point of view, we may say that she [non-Western woman] has an inferior position, and she herself may feel this to be the case, but she is not resentful on account of it. She sees herself as different from man and as having a social status different from him; but...it is for her less a matter of level, than of difference, of status.³

Western feminist principles would immediately denounce this female complementarity to the African male as a direct indication of active patriarchal interference. In the case of Adah, the childhood impression of her female role within society is simply accepted in terms of tribal custom, not sexual oppression:

One might think...that Africans treated

their children badly. But to Adah's people and to Adah herself, this was not so at all; it was the custom...Nobody was interested in her for her own sake, only in the money she would fetch, and the housework she could do and Adah, happy at being given this opportunity of survival, did not waste time thinking about its rights or wrongs. She had to survive. (19)

Yet, it is this same Adah who later revolts against the denial of education to women, her rage refusing to be silenced by either society or tradition.

Since this streak of defiance is still unable to initiate an automatic divorce from the past, it is necessary to turn to what Molara Ogundipe-Leslie believes to be the source of the African woman's oppression, herself, since she is "shackled by [her] own negative self-image, by centuries of the interiorization of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy".⁴ This female internalization of society's social and cultural expectations is perhaps, above all else, the key to the ultimate silencing of rage within *The Slave Girl* and *The Joys of Motherhood*. Even Adah, by far the most progressive of the three heroines, is slow to shake off the weight of deference to the male prerogatives inscribed within tribal belief, precisely because of her lifelong exposure to African dogma.

To end on this note would overshadow, however, the importance of characters like Adaku and Ma Palagada, whose trading abilities, integral to the African

woman's reality, are linked to female power. Indeed, it would even devalue the individual acts of rebellion shown by the three protagonists themselves.

In *The Slave Girl*, Emecheta actually identifies the notion of rebellion as within the scope of the African woman's power in traditional Igbo society. She alludes to a sophisticated and historically documented female revolt against the British, "the Aba riot, when the market women rebelled against being taxed" (135). Whilst the female aspect of this defiance was subsequently submerged by the colonial power, the native title, "The Women's War", clearly identifies the nature of the actual participants involved. According to Judith Van Allen:

'Women's War'...conveys an action by women that is also an extension of their traditional method for settling grievances with men who had acted badly toward them...for some African women - and Igbo women are a striking example - actual or potential autonomy, economic independence, and political power did not grow out of Western influences but existed already in traditional 'tribal' life. To the extent that Igbo women have participated in any political action...it has been not so much because of the influence of Western values as despite that influence.⁵

In view of this historical allusion, one is forced to look again at the question of female status within the traditional context, since even if the woman's position is not ideal, it is made at least

tolerable by the presence of sanctified safeguards and privileges, specifically designed to both curb the "actual" incidence of female oppression and challenge its potential manifestation.

Within the context of the novels, the Umuisagba women's direct flouting of traditional marital conventions in the prologue to *The Slave Girl* further highlights the powerful extent of the African woman's authority within the traditional sphere:

the daughters of Umuisagba...would never
deign to comply with this
tradition...[loyalty] to her husband, his
gods, and his people. (11)

All three of the heroines examined in this thesis actually evince the same innate vitality and resilience that elicits gestures of defiance and revolt. The moments when they are forced to accede to "oppression" are directly attributable to colonialism, which having stripped the African past of its dignity, has contaminated the present with its ideals and left the future floundering in a state of cultural uncertainty.

Failure to recognize these disturbances only serves to augment the native's vulnerability to subordinating traditional/colonial ideologies, as in the case of Ojebeta. Self-realization is thus the

first step to forging beyond the confines of any "oppression". It is only when this is accompanied by a rejection of a colonizer/colonized mentality, however, that the native can begin to move from a resentful but finally passive, Nnu Ego-like state to active revolt, shaking off the past in order to proceed, like Adah, into a future of her own design.

Even though Adah is perched on the brink of a "new" female existence, her future is still only defined on the basis of her own hopes and ambitions, "they were going to be...a black of a different breed" (154). The next stage in her thrust towards independence as woman and mother will present perhaps the ultimate challenge, since it will demand an inner resolution of the conflict between an African and feminist female identity.⁶

ENDNOTES

I. Introduction

- ¹ Mohandes Ghandi. Quoted in Ketu H. Katrak, "Decolonizing Culture: Toward A Theory For Postcolonial Women's Texts," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 35(1) (1989), 167.
- ² Stephen Slemon, "Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 23(1) (1988), 159.
- ³ Katrak, p. 167.
- ⁴ See Katrak, p. 168.
- ⁵ Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 19.
- ⁶ Arun P. Mukherjee, "Whose Post-Colonialism and Whose Postmodernism?" *World Literature Written in English*, 30(2) (1990), 6.
- ⁷ See Kirsten Holst Petersen, "First Things First: Problems of a Feminist Approach to African Literature," *Kunapipi*, VI(3) (1984), 35-46.
- ⁸ Carole Boyce Davies, "Motherhood in the Works of Male and Female Igbo Writers: Achebe, Emecheta, Nwapa and Nzekwu," in *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, eds. Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1986), p. 244.
- ⁹ In view of the heterogeneous nature of African society, no attempt will be made to oversimplify its cultural complexities. All subsequent references to "African society" or the "African woman" in this paper will thus be strictly in relation to the Ibo African context.
- ¹⁰ Emmanuel Obiechina, *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 83.

- 11 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "'Draupadi' by Mahasveta Devi: Translated with a Foreword by G. C. Spivak," *Critical Inquiry*, Winter, (1981), 381.
- 12 See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 25.
- 13 Beatrice Stegeman, Quoted in Katherine Frank, "Feminist Criticism and the African Novel," *African Literature Today*, 14 (1984), 46.
- 14 Buchi Emecheta, Quoted in *African Voices: Interviews with Thirteen African Writers*, Raoul Granqvist and John Stotesbury (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1989), p. 19.
- 15 Carole Boyce Davies, "Introduction: Feminist Consciousness and African Literary Criticism," in *Ngambika*, p. 9.
- 16 Katherine Frank, "The Death of the Slave Girl: African Womanhood in the Novels of Buchi Emecheta," *World Literature Written in English*, 21(3) (1982), 479.

II. SLAVERY VERSUS REVOLT IN *THE SLAVE GIRL*.

- 1 Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Women Native Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 122.
- 2 Buchi Emecheta, *The Slave Girl*, (London: Allison & Busby, 1977), p. 11.
Subsequent page references to this work will appear in parentheses.
- 3 Eustace Palmer, "The Feminine Point of View: Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*," *African Literature Today*, 13 (1983), 39.
- 4 Renan, p. 19.
- 5 Quoted in Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1968 [trans. originally published 1952]), pp. 98-99.

- 6 Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971), p. 25.
- 7 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 100.
- 8 Obiechina, p. 202.
- 9 Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 297.
- 10 Obiechina, p. 85.
- 11 Nancy J Hafkin and Edna G. Bay, eds., *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), p. 77.
- 12 Quoted in Robert Fatton, Jr., "Gender, Class, and State in Africa," in *Women and The State in Africa*, eds. Jane L. Parpart and Kathleen A. Staudt (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), p. 50.

III . MOTHERHOOD AS INSTITUTION IN THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD.

- 1 Simone de Beauvoir, Quoted in Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), p. 68.
- 2 Quoted in Abdul R. JanMohammed, *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983), p. 153.
- 3 Quoted in Elleke Boehmer, "Stories of Women and Mothers: Gender and Nationalism in the Early Fiction of Flora Nwapa," in *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, The Caribbean and South Asia*, ed. Susheila Nasta (London: The Women's Press, 1991), p. 5.
- 4 Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood*, (Oxford: Heinemann, 1988), p. 12.

Subsequent page references to this work will appear in parentheses.

- 5 Frank, "The Death of The Slave Girl: African Womanhood in the Novels of Buchi Emecheta," p. 488.
- 6 Ketu H. Katrak, "Womanhood/Motherhood: Variations on a Theme in Selected Novels of Buchi Emecheta," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 22(1) (1987), 166.
- 7 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of The Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York, Grove Weidenfeld, 1991 [trans. originally published 1961]), p. 211.
- 8 Quoted in Carole Boyce Davies, "Introduction: Feminist Consciousness and African Literary Criticism," p. 11.
- 9 Quoted in Carole Boyce Davies, "Motherhood in the Works of Male and Female Igbo Writers: Achebe, Emecheta, Nwapa and Nzekwu," p. 241.
- 10 Frank, "Death of the Slave Girl: African Womanhood in the Novels of Buchi Emecheta," p. 488.
- 11 Ibid, p. 489.
- 12 Palmer, p. 49.

IV. THRUST TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE IN *SECOND-CLASS CITIZEN.*

- 1 Ojo-Ade, Quoted in Mineke Schipper, "Mother Africa on a Pedestal: The Male Heritage in African Literature and Criticism," *Women in African Literature Today*, 15 (1987), p. 51.
- 2 Beatrice Stegeman, Quoted in Frank, "Feminist Criticism and the African Novel," p. 46.
- 3 Quoted in Abdul R. JanMohammed, *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa*, p. 192.

- 4 Quoted in Frank, "The Death of the Slave Girl: African Womanhood in the Novels of Buchi Emecheta, p. 481.
- 5 Buchi Emecheta, *Double Yoke*, (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1989), p. 97.
Subsequent page references to this work will appear in parentheses.
- 6 See Spivak, p. 381.
This observation could even perhaps lead one to question Emecheta's own feminist vision, since she too is "physically" removed from the traditional context.
- 7 Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1990), p. 14.
Subsequent page references to this work will appear in parentheses.
- 8 Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985) 63.
- 9 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 18.
- 10 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 7.
- 11 See William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Frank Kermode, (London: Routledge, 1989).
"You taught me language; and my profit on't/Is, I know how to curse" p. 33.
This quote has implications for the social, cultural and psychological processes that proceed from the native's acquisition of the colonial tongue. See Daniel Massa, "The Postcolonial Dream," *World Literature Written in English*, 20(1), "I have been given this tool and I intend to use it". p. 140.
- 12 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 98.
- 13 Carolyn Burke, Quoted in Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. Elizabeth Abel (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 20.
- 14 Elleke Boehmer, p. 10.

V. CONCLUSION

- ¹ Obiechina, p. 84.
- ² Quoted in Mineke Schipper, ed., *Unheard Words: Women and Literature in Africa, The Arab World, Asia, The Caribbean and Latin America*, (London: Allison & Busby, 1985), p. 53.
- ³ Quoted in Nancy J. Hafkin & Edna G. Bay, p. 3.
- ⁴ Davies, "Introduction: Feminist Consciousness and African Literary Criticism," p. 8.
- ⁵ Nancy J. Hafkin & Edna G. Bay, p. 62.
- ⁶ See Emecheta's novel, *In the Ditch* (London: Allison & Busby, 1972). This text goes on to explore Adah's development within the English context. It traces her physical, mental and emotional ordeals as a single, black African/English woman and mother.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Emecheta, B. (1977). *The Slave Girl*. London: Allison & Busby.

_____. (1988). *The Joys of Motherhood*. Oxford: Heinemann.

_____. (1989). *Double Yoke*. London: Fontana Paperbacks.

_____. (1990). *Second-Class Citizen*. London: Fontana Paperbacks.

SECONDARY SOURCES

BOOKS

Abel, E. (Ed.). (1982). *Writing and Sexual Difference*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. & Tiffin, H. (1989). *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge.

Badejo, D. L. (Ed.). (1985). *Women in Nigeria Today*. London: Zed Books.

Bhabha, H. K. (Ed.). (1990). *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge.

Bishop, R. (1988). *African Literature, African Critics: The Forming of Critical Standards, 1947-1966*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

Chinweizu, Jemie, O. & Madubuike, I. (1983). *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*. Washington: Howard University Press.

- Connor, S. (1989). *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Cook, D. (1977). *African Literature: A Critical View*. London: Longman.
- Davies, C. B. & Graves, A. A. (Eds.). (1986). *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*. New Jersey: Africa World Press.
- Davis, A. Y. (1981). *Woman, Race & Class*. New York: Random House.
- De Beauvoir, S. (1949). *Le Deuxième Sexe*. France: L'Imprimerie Floch Mayenne.
- Engels, F. (1977). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and The State: In the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Fanon, F. (1968). *Black Skin, White Masks*. (Charles Lam Markmann, Trans.). New York: Grove Press.
- _____. (1991). *The Wretched of The Earth*. (Constance Farrington, Trans.). New York: Grove Weidenfeld.
- Felski, R. (1989). *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. UK: Hutchinson Radius.
- Granqvist, R. & Stotesbury, J. (1989). *African Voices: Interviews with Thirteen African Writers*. Sydney: Dangaroo Press.
- Hafkin, N. J. & Bay, E. G. (Eds.). (1976). *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Irele, A. (1981). *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*. London: Heinemann.
- JanMohamed, A. R. (1983). *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Jayawardena, K. (1989). *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*. London: Zed Books.
- Leith-Ross, S. (1965). *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

- Mannoni, O. (1956). *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*. (Pamela Powesland, Trans.). London: Methuen.
- Millett, K. (1971). *Sexual Politics*. London: Rupert Hart-Davis.
- Minh-ha, T. T. (1989). *Women Native Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mphahlele, E. (1974). *The African Image*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Nasta, S. (Ed.). (1991). *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, The Caribbean and South Asia*. London: The Women's Press.
- Obiechina, E. (1975). *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Otokunefor, H. C. & Nwodo, O. C. (Eds.). (1989). *Nigerian Female Writers: A Critical Perspective*. Lagos: Malthouse Press.
- Parpart, J. L. & Staudt, K. A. (Eds.). (1989). *Women and The State in Africa*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Petersen, K. H. & Rutherford, A. (1986). *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing*. Oxford: Dangaroo Press.
- Priebe, R. K. (1988). *Myth, Realism and the West African Writer*. New Jersey: Africa World Press.
- Rich, A. (1976). *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Roscoe, A. (1977). *Mother is Gold: A Study in West African Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Said, E. (1984). *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. London: Faber and Faber.
- _____. (1985). *Orientalism*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Schipper, M. (Ed.). (1985). *Unheard Words: Women and Literature in Africa, The Arab World, Asia, The Caribbean and Latin America*. London: Allison & Busby.

- Shakespeare, W. (1989). *The Tempest*. London: Routledge.
- Soyinka, W. (1978). *Myth, Literature and The African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Taiwo, O. (1984). *Female Novelists of Modern Africa*. London: Macmillan Publishers.
- Woolf, V. (1989). *A Room of One's Room*. London: Grafton Books.

ARTICLES

- Ashcroft, W. D. (1989). Intersecting Marginalities: Post-Colonialism and Feminism. *Kunapipi*. XI(2). 23-35.
- Bazin, N. T. (1985). Weight of Custom, Signs of Change: Feminism in the Literature of African Women. *World Literature Written in English*. 25(2). 183-197.
- Bruner, C. (1986). The Other Audience: Children and the Example of Buchi Emecheta. *The African Studies Review*. 29(3). 129-140.
- Bruner, C. & Bruner, D. (1985). Buchi Emecheta and Maryse Condé: Contemporary Writing from Africa and the Caribbean. *World Literature Today: A Literary Quarterly of the University of Oklahoma*. 59(1). 9-13.
- Brydon, D. (1989). Commonwealth or Common Poverty?: the New Literatures in English and the New Discourse of Marginality. *Kunapipi*. XI(1). 1-16.
- Bunn, D. (1988). Embodying Africa: Woman and Romance in Colonial Fiction. *English In Africa*. 15(1). 1-28.
- Chrisman, L. (1990). The Imperial Unconscious? Representation of Imperial Discourse. *Critical Quarterly*. 32(3). 38-58.

- Emenyonu, E. N. (1988). Technique and Language in
Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*, *The Slave Girl* and *The Joys of Motherhood*. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. 23(1), 130-141.
- Frank, K. (1982). The Death of the Slave Girl:
African Womanhood in the Novels of Buchi
Emecheta. *World Literature Written in English*.
21(3), 476-497.
- _____. (1984). Feminist Criticism and the
African Novel. *African Literature Today*. 14,
34-48.
- _____. (1987). Women Without Men: The Feminist
Novel in Africa. *Women in African Literature
Today*. 15, 14-33.
- Iyasere, S. O. (1975). African Critics on African
Literature: A Study in Misplaced Hostility.
African Literature Today. 7, 20-27.
- JanMohamed, A. R. (1985). The Economy of Manichean
Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in
Colonialist Literature. *Critical Inquiry*. 12,
59-87.
- Katrak, K. H. (1987). Womanhood/Motherhood:
Variations on a Theme in Selected Novels of
Buchi Emecheta. *The Journal of Commonwealth
Literature*. 22(1), 159-170.
- _____. (1989). Decolonizing Culture: Toward
A Theory For Postcolonial Women's Texts.
Modern Fiction Studies. 35(1), 157-179.
- Massa, D. (1981). The Postcolonial Dream. *World
Literature Written in English*. 20(1), 135-149.
- Mukherjee, A. P. (1990). Whose Post-Colonialism
and Whose Postmodernism? *World Literature
Written in English*. 30(2), 1-9.
- _____. (1991). The Exclusions of
Postcolonial Theory and Mulk Raj Anand's
"Untouchable": A Case Study. *Ariel: A Review
of International English Literature*. 22(3),
27-48.
- Ngara, E. (1989). The Portrayal of Women in
African Literature. *Kunapipi*. XI(3), 34-40.
- O'Flinn, J. P. (1975). Towards a Sociology of the
Nigerian Novel. *African Literature Today*. 7,
34-52.

- Ogundipe-Leslie, M. (1987). The Female Writer and
.. Her Commitment. *Women in African Literature Today*. 15, 5-13.
- Palmer, E. (1982). A Powerful Female Voice in the
African Novel: Introducing the Novels of Buchi
Emecheta. *New Literature Review*. 11, 21-33.
- _____. (1983). The Feminine Point of View:
Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*.
African Literature Today. 13, 38-55.
- Parry, B. (1987). Problems in Current Theories of
Colonial Discourse. *Oxford Literary Review*.
9, 27-58.
- Petersen, K. H. (1984). First Things First:
Problems of a Feminist Approach to African
Literature. *Kunapipi*. VI(3), 35-47.
- Porter, A. M. (1988). *Second Class Citizen: The*
Point of Departure for Understanding Buchi
Emecheta's Major Fiction. *International*
Fiction Review. 15(2), 123-129.
- Schipper, M. (1987). Mother Africa on a Pedestal:
The Male Heritage in African Literature and
Criticism. *Women in African Literature Today*.
15, 35-54.
- Slemon, S. (1988). Post-Colonial Allegory and the
Transformation of History. *The Journal of*
Commonwealth Literature. 23(1), 157-168.
- Slemon, S. Tiffin, H. (1989). Post-Colonial
Criticism. *Kunapipi*. XI(1).
- Solberg, R. (1983). The Woman of Black Africa,
Buchi Emecheta: The Woman's Voice in the New
Nigerian Novel. *English Studies: A Journal of*
English Language and Literature. 64(3), 247-
262.
- Spivak, G. C. (1981). "Draupadi" by Mahasveta.
Devi: Translated with a Foreword by Gayatri
Chakravorty Spivak. *Critical Inquiry*. Winter,
381-402.
- _____. (1985). Three Women's Texts and a
Critique of Imperialism. *Critical Inquiry*.
12, 243-261.
- _____. (1986). Imperialism and Sexual
Difference. *Oxford Literary Review*. 8, 225-
240.

Tiffin, H. (1988). Post-Colonialism, Post-
- Modernism and the Rehabilitation of Post-
Colonial History. *The Journal of Commonwealth
Literature*. 23(1), 169-181.

_____ (1987). Post-Colonial Literatures and
Counter-Discourse. *Kunapipi*. IX(3), 17-34.